AID Confirms Its Use As CIA Cover in Laos

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By William N. Curry
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The head of the U.S. foreign aid program confirmed yesterday that CIA agents use the civilian aid mission in Laos as a cover for anti-Communist operations, much to his displeasure.

But he asserted that Laos "is the only place in the world" where CIA operatives masquerade as field workers of the Agency for International Development (AID).

AID Administrator John A. Hannah, asked if the CIA uses the mission in Laos as a cover, said: "Well, I just have to admit that this is true. This was a decision that was made back in 1962 and by administrations from now until then, and it is the only place in the world that we are."

He said, "We have had people that have been associated with the CIA and doing things in Laos that were believed to be in the national interest but not routine AID operations.

"Our preference is to get rid of this kind of operation."

Previously, the aid agency has declined to comment on published reports that CIA agents pose as AID rural development workers but actually recruit and train anti-Communist guerrillas, detect enemy movements and act as ground controllers for air strikes.

The 1962 Geneva Convention declared Laos a neutral country.

Hannah's remarks were made on the Metromedia radio news program "Profile."

Hannah said he hopes the connection between the two agencies could be eliminated in a proposed revamping of AID. The separation was one recommendation of a recent task force that studied AID.

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"I am sure that it is going to be in the President's recommendations for discussion," he said. "I hope it is going to be in the legislation once that is submitted."

Hannah conceded that the AID role in Laos, plus its war-related activities in Vietnam, "might" have an adverse affect on the AID programs to other nations. "It certainly has not helped . . . It distorts the role of AID," he said. But he defended the original decisions to involve AID as being correct when they were made in 1962.

Hannah was president of Michigan State University when it agreed to train South Vietnamese police officers for the Ngo Dinh Diem regime. The program turned out to be run by the CIA.

Hannah, who joined AID in 1969, said President Nixon "places a high priority" on the foreign aid program and expressed hope that the Senate will restore recent House-made cuts in AID's budget request for the coming fiscal year.

JOHN A. HANNAH
. . . defends '62 decision